

U.S. MILITARY READINESS: A DEEP CONCERN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. STEARNS) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the President released his budget for fiscal year 2001, and with that begins another round of authorizations and appropriations.

This afternoon what I want to do is focus on the issue of military readiness, a concept which the administration, until recently, has failed to embrace. In fact, the President has consistently proposed defense budgets which were completely inadequate.

I am happy to see that the President has proposed a \$11.3 billion increase in discretionary defense spending in recognition of the deplorable circumstances with which this administration has allowed our forces to deteriorate.

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States military has been forced to do more with less. The defense budget has decreased by 8 percent, or \$24 billion, since 1990, and is the only major spending category to steadily decline since 1994. In contrast, the non-discretionary spending and entitlements have increased nearly 60 percent, or \$458 billion.

Despite the reduced spending and force reductions, the pace of operations, other than war, has increased dramatically. Our forces are engaged in humanitarian, peacekeeping, civil assistance, and other areas of non-combat operations. In addition, the United States continues to engage in combat operations over Iraq and the conflict in former Yugoslavia. In terms of commitments abroad, the United States has about 260,000 personnel in over 100 countries, according to the Department of Defense.

The Clinton administration has pursued a military policy of open-ended commitments to operations which have had no bearing on our national security at home or abroad. U.S. military forces have been deployed more times under this administration than they were throughout the entire Cold War period.

This pace and scope of non-combat operations, the time away from family, and substandard pay and benefits have led to recruitment and retention problems. In fact, the Marine Corps was the only service to meet its recruiting requirements for 1999. Our forces are now coping with the inability to recruit highly qualified individuals, while at the same time losing the most experienced soldiers. My office has received letters from constituents, many of whom having proudly served in our Armed Forces, saying they were inclined to discourage young Americans from joining today's military force.

Mr. Speaker, this is a demoralizing statement to hear. To add further emphasis,

the Heritage Foundation, in its National Defense Report, concluded that our military is suffering the worst personnel crisis since the draft ended in 1973.

The problem extends beyond personnel. Operations and maintenance accounts have suffered, and the lack of funding has resulted in spare parts shortages and the cannibalizing of existing equipment. Cannibalizing for parts, once considered a last resort to maintain combat capability, is now a common practice.

Nations which may be potentially hostile to the United States are investing in advanced weaponry and technological upgrades to existing systems which can seriously impact our military superiority. For example, China in fact is working on a defense system that may be able to defeat stealth technology by monitoring radio and television waves for turbulence resulting from aircraft flight. In addition, smaller countries can invest in and upgrade highly capable and advanced surface-to-air missiles for a fraction of the cost of an offensive weapon platform. Such a high-volume air defense could spell disaster for current U.S. air forces.

Mr. Speaker, these are but a fraction of the concerns facing military readiness. Last year, Congress recognized the need to halt the decline of our military. We provided for an increase in pay, retention bonuses, procurement, research and development and operations and maintenance, over \$4 billion above the President's request.

I look forward to examining the President's budget for 2001 to see exactly where his goals lie and how he plans to allocate the funding for our military. I sincerely hope he has realized inadequate funding leads to inadequate forces. I need not emphasize what drastic consequences inadequate forces would lead to.

INAUGURAL MEETING OF INTER-AGENCY GROUP ON INSULAR AFFAIRS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 19, 1999, the gentleman from Guam (Mr. UNDERWOOD) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. UNDERWOOD. Mr. Speaker, nearly 2 weeks ago President Clinton delivered his final State of the Union. It included the achievements of his administration, remarkable as they are, over the past 7½ years, rebuilding and returning America's economy to great posterity; over 20 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment rates in 30 years, the lowest poverty rates in 20 years, the longest period of economic growth in America's history. President Clinton also pointed out that we have crossed the bridge we have built to the 21st Century and that we must now shape a new 21st Century American revolution of opportunity, responsibility, and community for all Americans.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are many Americans who do not participate in this prosperity. There are thousands of Americans who do not enjoy the prosperity that most of America has felt across the Nation. Americans living in the U.S. Territories, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa, often rely on economic factors and economies apart from the American mainland for their economic well-being.

U.S. Territories are unique because we are not fully incorporated with the U.S. Though we share many issues with our fellow Americans living in the U.S. mainland, our geography, our history and our political status present a number of economic challenges common amongst ourselves. Our commonalities, however, give this Nation and the President the opportunity to craft Federal policy that recognizes our status and extraordinary challenges to participate in the prosperity of the Nation.

Like no other President, Mr. Clinton has risen and has been responsive to the challenge and has created an Inter-agency Group on Insular Areas called IGIA to provide guidance on Federal policies towards the U.S. Territories. This initiative will include Governors and Delegates to Congress and other elected officials that will come together and bring together some coherence in Federal policy.

Next month, this inaugural meeting of the IGIA will take place. This will be an historic moment for the leaders of the territories, and I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the IGIA meeting and forum to address issues of economic development in Guam, particularly land and taxes, and, in light with that, to also remember the President's call to include all Americans in the prosperity of the Nation and to finally craft a policy which will bring the Territories into the prosperity of the Nation.

Many of the situations that we face in Guam in terms of land and taxes need reform so that we can economically grow. We still face problems on the return of excess Federal lands. We are a small territory, but over one-third of our land is held by the Federal Government and we need assistance in making sure that these valuable lands are returned to the people of Guam.

We are also trying to seek equity in the taxation of Guam, particularly for foreign direct investment. I have introduced a bill, H.R. 2462, which brings equity between Guam and other areas of the United States in terms of taxing foreign investment. Right now we are disproportionately taxed. In another related area, my colleague, the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN), has introduced a bill, H.R. 3247, which would make U.S. Territories eligible for empowerment zone designation. These are all resources that are a hand up, not a handout, and will go a long way towards bringing